

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION ACT TO HELP WORLD'S WILDLIFE, SECRETARY HICKEL SAYS

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel said today that proposed regulations issued by the Interior Department to implement the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 will have a significant impact upon preserving the world's wildlife.

The proposed new rules, developed by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, have been published in the Federal Register, and the public has been invited to comment. The regulations are scheduled to become effective on June 3, when the Act goes into force.

At that time, the importation of wildlife species believed by the Secretary of the Interior to be threatened with worldwide extinction will be banned except for certain scientific and educational purposes or for propagation to preserve the species. At the present time, the Secretary has a tentative list of 81 birds, 61 mammals, 10 reptiles and amphibians, 8 fish and 1 mollusk which appear to be endangered worldwide. His own domestic list includes 89 species endangered in the United States.

Assistant Secretary Leslie L. Glasgow, who heads Interior's programs for fish, wildlife, parks, and marine resources, has said that the regulations will be "rigidly enforced" by agents of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

The Endangered Species Conservation Act greatly strengthens the hand of the Federal Government in banning importation of endangered species. Previously Uncle Sam could prevent the importation of injurious species such as fruit bats, mongooses and walking catfish, or of birds and mammals taken or exported contrary to foreign laws.

Now the Federal Government will have authority over all wildlife imports. The statute requires documentary proof that the wildlife imported was legally taken in the country of origin.

To facilitate enforcement, fish and wildlife imports will be restricted to six ports of entry: New York, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Honolulu. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife plans to increase from four to eight the number of its import inspectors by July 1. With the assistance of the Treasury Department's Bureau of Customs port inspectors, they will inspect all wildlife imports to assure compliance with the Act.

"Our game management agents are going to do much more efficient jobs when the new regulations are implemented," Dr. Glasgow said.

He said that seizures of illegally imported wildlife in the past year included three instances where containers were not even labeled as containing animal skins. Those three seizures involved 230 leopard skins at Los Angeles, 180 leopard skins at Champlain, New York, and 32 cheetah skins at Los Angeles.

The new statute also provides stiffer penalties for violations. The Secretary of the Interior may assess a civil penalty of \$5,000. Under the criminal sections, a violator may be fined a maximum of \$10,000 or receive one year in jail, or both. The maximum penalties under previous legislation were \$500 or six months in jail, or both.

Domestically, the statute also makes it a Federal offense to sell or purchase any reptile, amphibian, mollusk or crustacean taken contrary to State laws if it crosses State lines. These activities already are unlawful for fish, mammals and birds. This will give the Fish and Wildlife agents authority to seize alligator hides taken by poachers, for example, or lobsters taken illegally in one State and sold in another.

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